

**Regional Focus Group Calls Summary:
Recreational and Commercial Input Received in December 2005
for 2007-2008 Regulation Development**

The Regional Focus Groups are a new way for the Department to solicit input from a representative group of constituents on specific issues, in this case, on the development of the regulations for the 2007-08 groundfish fishery.

Purpose: To receive constituent input specific to each fishing region along the state for development of the 2007-08 groundfish fishery regulations.

Source: From "Summary of Focus Group Conference Calls" documents previously sent to Regional Focus Group participants

I. COMMERCIAL FISHERY REGIONAL INPUT

A. North Coast Commercial Focus Group Input:

- The question was asked if those from DFG were familiar with the north coast. Since most of the staff present was involved with the Nearshore Fishery Management Plan, yes. There is a very low effort in the north.
- Thanks were expressed for including fishermen in the process
- Refine nearshore permit to make it transferable
 - Many older fishermen are starting to think about getting out of the fishery
 - Easier to hire deck hands if they think there might be a chance to get a permit
 - Makes it easier on wives or children when a fisherman dies
 - Oregon has transferable permits – don't understand California's reason of having to have the rockfish delegated to CA by the Council
 - Like to see transfers as one-to-one
 - Reducing the number of permittees on the north coast shouldn't really be a concern – not that many anyway
- Economic issue of lingcod being declared rebuilt
 - Would like to see the Department come up with options on how to liberalize lingcod
 - If Department says no, fine. Make a decision. Let us know why, or why not
 - Are we going to be able to fish a higher OY – Council has said no
 - We were allowed an extra month last year – can we expect that again
 - Would like to see fishing April to November
 - Fishing lighter in November due to crab fishing
 - Like to stay with 300 lbs per month
 - Don't lessen trip limit just to let us fish extra time
 - Would like to see a higher trip limit in summer with less fishing in fall
 - Not seeing yelloweye or canary in with lingcod
- Cabezon, greenling and lingcod are very abundant
 - Need higher trip limits
 - Like to see them included in the 1200 lb. "other than black" category
 - This would be good for some, not so much for others
 - Are you willing to have the season close earlier if we raise the trip limit?
 - We would rather have a steadier limit year round – an even amount for cabezon

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- Greenling trip limit is a slap in the face
 - By the time we can fish for them the season is closed
 - They are very abundant in the north
- We would like to see a regional TAC
 - we don't even know what the northern fishermen have actually caught
 - please distribute regional catch data
- Concern about Marine Sanctuaries – MLPA Initiative
- Look at the black and blue rockfish ratio – DFG would like to get an idea of how to best approach this issue
 - There is very little overlap
 - Blue is shallow water fish
 - Fish for black and blue in different areas
 - There just isn't much blue bycatch
 - Historically there has been a lot of mis-recording of these fish. Sometimes even cabezon has been recorded as black
 - There should be separate black and blue categories
 - We can hardly sell blues
 - Would like to know what percentage of "other than" is black or blue (94-99 was ~8% blue, ~92% black)
 - What was the percentage of the 1200 lbs – have to find out
 - Blues are so plentiful overfishing shouldn't be a concern
 - Weather is also an issue
 - When swells are up, the fish go deeper
 - Blues are everywhere
 - The market wants black
 - Sometimes the market wants fish so bad, they will take the blues
 - That is why you don't see them on the tickets – we aren't targeting them
 - We don't really want to catch them

Suggestions:

- Thanks again for including us
- We've always felt ignored
- Nothing has really changed
- Provided us with information, but not what we wanted to hear
- We would really like to see you visit this area – very unique
- You really can't tell what the population is like by looking at the landing receipts
- Happy you are looking into the lingcod issue
- We need our catch information
 - We can't help you on these calls without it
- The more information you can feed us the better
 - We need to know some of the biology such as spawning times
- The more fishermen in this area involved the better. Won't land on only one person's shoulders as often

Parking Lot Issues:

- Regional TACs, for cabezon and greenling especially
- MPA issues
- Blue and black rockfish issue

B. North-Central Coast Commercial Focus Group Input:

- Regional Allocation – would prefer limits proportional to respective fish abundances in different regions per stock assessments, with expectation that this would increase proportion allotted to the area north of 34°27' N lat.
- Cabezon – prefer limits spread more evenly, same tonnage per wave. Also, if an increase in total / year possible (e.g., shift of allocation to north of 34°27'), would prefer increase to be focused in summer.
- Lingcod – sees much abundance, would like extended season over Nov-Feb period. Does not believe fish are vulnerable during nesting period, considering their behavior and the use of bait fishing. They are vulnerable to spear diving and maybe shore.
- Deeper, Shallow Permits – OK, unfair to make big change. No problem with people moving around.
- Call Format – OK, would be good to have more people on line to bounce ideas off of.
- Minor Nearshore Rockfish Allocation – OK, should stay the same.

C. South-Central Coast Commercial Focus Group Input:

- We would like to have regional allocations.
 - Does the Dept have the resources?
 - Is it a possibility in 2007-08?
 - Our original plan for the NFMP was that regional allocation would reflect the resources of the area and our historical catches (this area caught the "lion's share"). State wide allocations are "watered down". South region caught the majority of the sheephead. We caught the majority of the cabezon.
 - Every one of the regions is so different it requires a different management strategy.
- We want a higher allotment of cabezon. May-June historically high catches. 900 lbs spread out over year.
- Let too many people into state limited entry. Qualifier of 500 lbs a year was too low (anyone could catch in 1 - 2 days). Highliners that really caught fish historically are the ones that got clobbered the worst (we are no longer highliners), especially trappers. Turned into a part-time fishery. Many fishermen have had to supplement income with other fisheries and other jobs. We've been slashed to the limit. We are at poverty level.
- Only one fish buyer left in Morro Bay.
- All allocations are so low. Want relief.
- Need to revise the two permits - shallow and deeper nearshore.
 - Should be combined into one permit as the fish often share depth strata and results in discard without both permits.
 - High fish mortality when fisherman with deeper nearshore permit fishes in deep water and catches shallow nearshore species that can not be retained and are dead (e.g. gopher rockfish).
 - Shallow nearshore is regional. Deeper nearshore is not regional.
 - CDFG - Would bycatch allowance be helpful? Yes.
- Cabezon and greenling.
 - Greenling allocation very low. Errors in past due to lumping fish on landing receipts. 25 lbs/2 month period (takes 1-2 days). If they are so plentiful why are we so limited? They are so abundant.
 - Individual quotas watered down throughout the state. Tagging study with Cal Poly, near port areas, over 100 fish a day (after the season closed). Like to see some

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- form of relief. Want DFG to consider what is sustainable (economically) for the fishermen (not just consider the resource).
 - CDFG – Greenling tried to produce a stock assessment that could reflect population, but didn't have enough data for a good assessment. The next stock assessment will be two years from now. Know that doesn't help now.
 - CDFG – Are you familiar with the tier system for sable fish?
 - Yes. We were excited about the tier system idea that Traci Bishop put together. Everyone should be cut by the same percentage. Fishermen are doing other fisheries (spot prawn, crab, lobster).
 - CDFG – What would be the tipping point to get fishermen back into the fishery? Reductions have made it really hard. Need to move off 50% (precautionary)
 - Ideally I would like to see regional management tied in with regional resources.
- Suggestions:** Would be good to have an agenda in advance of call.

D. South Coast Commercial Focus Group Input:

- Constraining fisheries
 - Canary doesn't really affect the southern fisheries
 - Rockfish constraints based on south of 40°10'
 - Depth restrictions – we can still catch other reds
- Would like to see Point Conception to Mexico border stay one management region
 - No concern over total number of regions statewide
 - Make sure seasons are synchronized (we experienced Port San Luis fishermen fishing in the Channel Islands when seasons were staggered)
- Would like season open January/February for the Chinese New Year
 - Lower trip limits for year round fisheries (for sheephead too)
 - Want cabezon open when rockfish season is – they are all in the water at the same time
 - Even out the trip limits – 200-300 lbs per two month period
- Don't break at Point Conception for trip limits
 - Cause an allocation war with regions
 - Based on historic catch
 - Southern landing receipts historically haven't broken species out – give incorrect idea of what the catch really was
 - Majority of quota will go to area with highest harvest rate
 - Look at species distribution and habitat analysis
- Lingcod
 - Nice to be able to retain
 - Like to see the season year round, or at least 10 months
 - They move in and out of area
 - Some fish were left on the table last year
 - Link their season to the rockfish season as well as spawning
- Greenling is not an issue in the south
- There are more blue rockfish than black
 - No value fish – don't like to keep them
 - Don't want them to impact the minor nearshore quota
- Would like the Department to look into an issue regarding Mexico fishery development
 - American guys go down, pay bribes to get a Mexican national to set up an operation, then import those fish up here

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- Lots of rockfish coming out of Mexico
- Would like to see the Cowcod Conservation Area opened up to deeper opportunities
- Would like to see some increases in size limits
 - Grass rockfish – raise the size limit at least one inch
 - At 12 inches, these are immature fish
 - 10 inches for gopher and black-and-yellow is too small
 - When the size for cabezon went up, we started seeing many more – they are like cockroaches out here
 - Could manage the shallow nearshore with size and slot limits – look at the Maine lobster fishery and the abalone fishery in Tasmania
- Would like the Department to look into why a spot prawn fisherman can't have shallow nearshore on board when pulling prawn traps – know the logic was because spot prawn are in the RCA and CCA – can't fish for shallow nearshore in there – too deep.
 - Would at least like to be able to retain sheephead with spot prawn

II. RECREATIONAL FISHERY REGIONAL INPUT

A. North Coast Recreational Focus Group Input:

Focus group call was scheduled but no participants called in. Received request to conduct one in the future.

B. North-Central Coast Recreational Focus Group Input:

- List of options that GAP asked the GMT to review
 - New line at Pt. Arena
 - Use recompression devices to allow fishing in deeper water (takes pressure of nearshore, several studies show that it works); OSU may have a report on the recompression device
 - Close canary hot spots and open cold spots in deeper water
- Canaries are very deep and under schooling rockfish. Could limit weight to keep fishing gear from going deep
- Regional quotas – manage by smaller areas to ensure that the take of constraining species does not close some areas before they can access rockfish
- Would like a midwater fishery seaward of RCA. If commercial fishermen can fish outside of RCA, recreational fishermen should be able to as well. Could limit line length to keep from hitting bottom. Able to fish in canyons would be nice.
- Lingcod – extend season to Dec, leave size and bag limit the same
- Lingcod – close in Dec, increase bag limit, lower size limit
- Rockfish area that goes into deeper water (different depth contour or fishing seaward of RCA), recompression devices, or lighter weight
- Align lingcod season with other rockfish
- Smaller management regions, rules change between regions
- Gopher stock assessment – positive, would like it used as a proxy for other nearshore species
- How will CRFS/MRFSS be used for management?
- CDFG - Weight recent data more than older data. Each year's data was devalued by x amount current 100%. Last year 70%, year before 70% of previous year, etc. (Note that only CRFS data will be used for 2007-08 catch modeling)
- Concerned about pulling out scorpionfish from the nearshore rockfish because they lose "wiggle room"

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- More months of fishing opportunities
- CDFG should go to bat for California, GMT doesn't spend enough time on California recreational fishery issues
- Shore-based and diver exemptions are still important. – CDFG concurred
- Regional management – DFG currently doesn't have resources to develop regional management. Could create more controversy between regions haggling over smaller allocations.
- Likes regional management – creates equity between regions and states, so it still needs to be considered. Unfair for one area to harvest most of constraining species and shut down another region before they can access the fish.
- Deep water fishery seaward of RCA – chilipeppers can be accessed.
- Regions – supports smaller, more regional management.
- Use recompression devices to allow for deeper opportunities, even though it will cost CPFV skippers money
- Logbook data should show that rockfish are everywhere. Best season ever in 2005!
- Need to look at tag-recapture data (Hanan tag caught off Farallones)
- Bocaccio caught in Washington tagged in Monterey – need more rockfish research, move more than we think
- Need more time on the water – like regulations from 2 years ago. If salmon is bad, really need other fishing opportunities
- Like regional management use Pigeon Point and Pedro Point because they have already been adopted
- Echoed others concerns – lingcod, deeper water opportunities
- Use gopher as a proxy could go to a data moderate situation and drop data-poor 50% precautionary approach. This would greatly increase nearshore allocations.
- Monterey complains that they compete for customers with Morro Bay which opens earlier and deeper. Monterey claims that they never catch canaries

C. South-Central Coast Recreational Focus Group Input:

- Depth 0-40 fm and let us have April - October (May – Sep is current season), so add a month on each end. Want more season in south central.
- Combine south central with south. Draw line at Piedras Blancas or Lopez Pt.
- Second preference – change to 60 fm (know yelloweye could be a problem).
- CDFG _ Times when 60 fm would be preferable?
 - Yes, April and October.
- CDFG - Yelloweye rockfish stock assessment may come in lower. Don't know where the yelloweye catch is most abundant
- Lingcod: Would prefer 3 fish and a size limit no less than 22 or 24 in. If there were no size limit he would make a "boat size limit". They need to gaff fish starting at 24 inches and is concerned about increased mortality.
- General Bag Limit - Do not want less than 10 fish bag limit.
- Would prefer going to first ten fish caught no matter what the species (except lingcod). Prevents throwing away dead fish and gets them off the water faster.
- Would give up cabezon to commercials for access to more rockfish species.
- What do we have to do get out of "data poor" and precautionary (50% of landings)?
- CDFG - Stock assessments.
 - This year's nearshore assessments: Cabezon, California scorpionfish, Gopher rockfish and Greenling.
- Do we have to have a stock assessment on each species?

California Department of Fish & Game

Prepared for Groundfish Task Force meeting, 1/11/06 revised 2/6/06

By: S. Ashcraft, CDFG

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- CDFG - No. Will look more closely at the gopher stock assessment and what it might say about other species.
 - Final goal is to have a stock assessment and an OY for each species.
- Why aren't blues removed from nearshore group?
- If there is "Hot Spot" analysis - Definitely want to be associated with south.
- For the "hot spot" analysis - will the Dept consider data collected by Cal Poly and the resulting recreational catch paper (J. Stevens and Dean Wendt) presented at CalCOFI?
 - CDFG - Will look into – has not seen published paper yet.
- When will the CRFS 2005 data be available? CDFG - There is a one month turn around time
- Vermilion Rockfish
 - Had best season, red is the best ever seen it.
 - Have learned to target them.
 - Even summer was good (traditionally not good in the summer).
 - Using plastic tackle.
- Canary Rockfish
 - See canary rockfish in 20 – 40 fm.
 - Above San Simeon.
 - Also, there is a drift in 18 fm right by current Diablo Canyon closed area.
 - Don't consider us a good canary rockfish area.
- Would like verification that weather is truly an issue in Oregon and Washington in winter months.
 - CDFG – Will ground truth when Oregon and Washington fishing actually occurs seasonally.
- What is the California scorpionfish current allowed amount?
- What is the bag limit for bocaccio - One or two fish? They want two fish to reduce dead discards. They use two hooks so usually catch two bocaccio when they catch any.
- Would like to see a comparison of data from CRFS with Cal Poly

D. South Coast Recreational Focus Group Input:

- Expressed concerns regarding the recent court ruling on darkblotched rockfish OY; waiting for final input; not sure if the economic impact of this ruling has been addressed. States that they've heard that even with scorpionfish being pulled out, the OY for nearshore RF is not going down.
- States that scorpionfish is critical for southern CPFVs, from Pt. Mugu south. Less important north of Pt. Mugu. However, pulling scorpionfish out of nearshore and a possible reduction in OY could impact CPFVs operating in Ventura/Santa Barbara counties, as they rely on nearshore RF and cannot depend on scorpionfish.
- Wants an increase in bag limit for lingcod, as the stock has recovered; lingcod survive catch and release very well.
- Would also like to see an increase in lingcod bag limit, perhaps increase size limit to 28"
- CDFG - Some management options include combining the Monterey and Morro South-Central Management Areas, a possible sub-limit on deeper nearshore rockfish, and spawning closures for cabezon and lingcod.
 - Feels strongly that the two management areas should remain separate, but defers to the people in those areas.
 - Is it possible to create a separate management area for SB/V counties?
- As far as a spawning closure for lingcod, would prefer to see it shorter on one end of the season or the other.

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- Wants a twelve month season for scorpionfish for 07-08; perhaps restrict this fishery to <20 fm during rockfish closure.
- CDFG - Would the CPFVs accept a bag limit reduction for scorpionfish to 4 fish to accommodate longer season?
 - No, would not like to see a bag limit reduction for scorpionfish; if there are not enough fish for a 12 month season, would prefer a 9 month season, with June, July and August closed, as scorpionfish are not targeted at that time
- Would like to see an increase in bag limit for bocaccio to 2 fish. Would like to see the depth restriction for the CCA changed from 20 fm to 40 fm.
- If there are excess scorpionfish, asks if they'd like to see a 12 month season or an increase in bag limit.
 - January and February are critical – need scorpionfish these two months.
- CDFG - Asks about rockfish bycatch when fishing scorpionfish.
 - That's why he proposed the <20 fm depth restriction during rockfish closure
 - Rockfish are only taken incidentally when fishing scorpionfish inside 20 fm.
- Wants the most simplification possible in the sport fishing regulations.
 - States sublimits for shallow nearshore RF did not work, does not want to see them for deeper nearshore RF.
 - Would like to see regulations be consistent through the year. States that inconsistency, more than complexity, deters fishermen from fishing.
- CPFVs in SB/V would not be fishing much in Jan/Feb, even if it were open, due to weather. Operators up there are resigned to losing these two months; would not want to lose other months.
- What is the status of the sheephead stock assessment and management options?
 - CDFG - Results of sheephead stock assessment complicated due to unique life history, DFG not comfortable adopting at this time.
 - Sheephead are incidental in SB/V counties, cannot comment on bag limits.
 - Slot limits for sheephead should still be an option. Scientists have identified sheephead as a key species, DFG should be proactive in management of this species.
 - Concerned with mortality of releasing bigger sheephead, due to air bladder expansion.
 - CDFG - Researchers from CSULB are examining sheephead mortality now.
 - Prefers split season for sheephead.
- Simpler regulations are easier to understand, and easier to enforce.
 - Florida sport fishing regulations are an example of simple, unchanging regulations.
- Wants increase in bocaccio bag limit. States that when a CPFV pulls up on a spot loaded with bocaccio, and anglers are using 2 hook gangions, they often come up with an overlimit of bocaccio on the first drop. Suggests either changing the gear restrictions to 1 hook (not in favor of this) or increasing bocaccio to 2 fish (supports this) to avoid overlimits.
- CDFG - Recent surveys show very few juvenile rockfish on the central coast.
 - Can have a fishery on a few successful year classes; not every single year class is going to be successful, and 1 or 2 years of poor recruitment is not cause for alarm.
- Concerned with changing depth restrictions – operators have trouble staying informed of current regulations. Would prefer consistent depth restriction for the entire season.
 - CDFG - Would you prefer an average depth?
 - No, he likes to be able to fish deeper, to 60 fm. However, he does not want to speak for operators north of Pt. Mugu. Again, suggests the need for a management area for SB/V counties.

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- Supports the creation of a new management area for SB/V counties.
- What about Ocean Whitefish (OW)?
 - CDFG - Not federally managed, falls into RF management because of close association with RF.
 - OW can be taken without RF bycatch in certain areas.
 - OW can be targeted without rockfish bycatch. Does not agree with the linkage between OW and RF, cabezon and lingcod. Would like to see a season structure similar to scorpionfish for OW.
 - Proposes depth restrictions to allow for OW take during rockfish closure.

Parking Lot Issues:

- Comparison between nearshore OY for 2005-06, which includes scorpionfish, and 2007-08, which does not include scorpionfish – is there any difference?
- Potential impact on SB/V county CPFVs when scorpionfish is removed from nearshore OY, if that OY is reduced
- What is the status of the sheephead stock assessment and management options?

Wrap-Up: DFG will get back to group with options in February 2006.

Suggestions:

- Would like to have the next call on Feb 20 or 21.
- Need more notice for the calls.
- Not available until after Feb 20.
- All agree that calls during business hours are preferable.

Thank you for participating and for your input!

Please share ideas for additional regional representatives we could contact.

List of Invitees:

North Coast Commercial Focus Group:

Bill DeBacker, Kenyon Hensel, Bill James, Mike Zamboni

North-Central Coast Commercial Focus Group:

Jim Bassler, Michael Kitahara, Dan Platt

South-Central Coast Commercial Focus Group:

David Allen, Roger Cullen, Tom Hafer, Bill James, Archie Ponds

South Coast Commercial Focus Group:

Robert Church, John Glawson, Chris Hoeflinger, Ken Mochizuki, Ron Rector

North Coast Recreational Focus Group:

Chuck Blackburn, Chuck Hagus, Ken Jones, Jimmy Smith

North-Central Coast Recreational Focus Group:

Bob Ingles, Jim Martin, Roger Thomas, Dan Walford

South-Central Coast Recreational Focus Group:

Howard Eagan, Steve Moore, Darby Neil, Kenny Stagnaro, Bill Williamson

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South Coast Recreational Focus Group:

Bob Fletcher, Joel Greenberg, Bob Osborn, Norris Tapp